

THE ANNALS OF THREE TAME HERMIT
THRUSHES.

BY CORDELIA J. STANWOOD.

When I took the nest in Linscott's Meadow containing the three young Thrushes, and was about to put it in my basket, the bottom of the nest fell out (Aug. 17, 1909, 9 a. m.). After a hasty examination of the nest, which was abnormal in some respects, I tossed the rim away, covered the little birds in the basket, and hurried from the neighborhood. The mother bird still called softly in the distance, *chuck!chuck!* Her remonstrances were few and gentle, however.

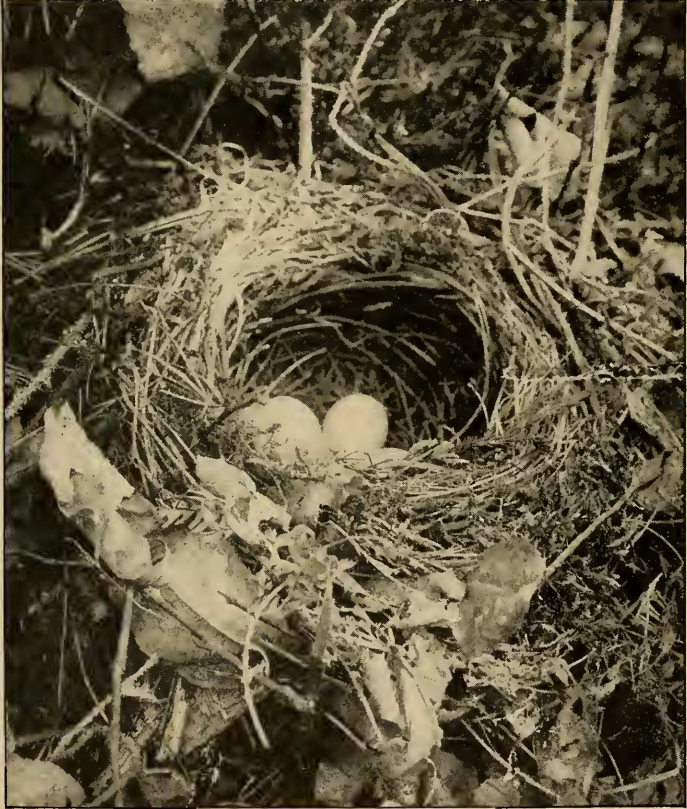
I had come to the conclusion that in order to make a successful study of young birds, a person needed to take two, at least. One would serve as a companion and mirror for the other. They would be less timid of their kind when returned to the woods, and less inclined to become pets; I hoped, also, to secure a singer.

The birds were small, and the third, a particularly fragile little thing. The fact that they were a second or third brood of the season may have accounted for their apparent lack of vitality.

It was a hard journey of six miles or more from my home to the nest and back again. The nest, as I intimated in the beginning, was peculiar. I felt that I would like to examine it, and yet that I could not return for that purpose. The smallest bird I would like to have dispensed with, but he was too immature to drive from the nest. I decided to take all the birds and the nest for further study, when the nest collapsed. Thus it was that I set out from Linscott's Meadow with three little Thrushes in my basket.

The nestlings showed no signs of fear. I was adopted for a mother by them from the time of my interference. They ate grasshoppers ravenously, and went to sleep on being fed. On the way home they partook of from twelve to fifteen grasshoppers and twelve blueberries.

The tail feathers were started, many bits of quill casings



Nest of Hermit Thrush

still remained on the feathers, and much natal down still clung to the tips of the feathers. I decided that they were about eight days old.

Although my examination of the dwelling place of these little Thrushes had been so cursory, I saw that the foundation of the nest was made almost entirely of sphagnum moss (*Sphagnum acutifolium*), which had been gathered and modelled while wet. The nest when dry was almost as firm and brittle as the mud cup of the Robin. The lining consisted of the orange setae of hair cap moss (*Polytrichum commune*) and hair cap moss itself, and yet a white pine grew within three or four yards of the nest; this was the first structure made by a Hermit Thrush that I had ever found without white pine needles in its lining. By 11 a. m. I was at home with the Thrush family. The birds took readily to ants' eggs, and bread and milk, as well as grasshoppers. They required a great deal more water than the Olive-backed Thrush would take.

The same large packing box that I used for the Olive-backed Thrush served as a bird house. In one end soft cotton wadding afforded a comfortable bed, in the other, a lilac branch met the requirements of a perch, and still a corner large enough was left to contain a fresh garden of earth and plants in a platter.

The birds were still in the nest stage and preferred to snuggle in a heap on the soft batting to sitting on a branch. They could not perch or stand for any length of time. They soon became so accustomed to the house that my footsteps on the hard floor did not awaken them.

The second day, at 4:30 a. m., the Thrushes called for food for the first time. I gave them a fresh linen towel to nestle on. Toward night they seemed nearly as active as the Olive-backed Thrush when ten days old. One lifted his foot and scratched his ear twice.

On the third day, when the little Hermits were really ten days old, they began to perch and fly. They also began to raise and lower their little stub-like tails.

The fourth day I left a little Hermit in the window sunning himself. When I returned a few moments later he was standing on the mantle in the shade.

I closed both shutters of one window, left the window up, and covered the ledge with fresh towels. The sun shone on the outside of the blind, and the birds nestled on the linen in blissful content. They fluttered and twittered for food, but were really too lazy to eat much. I learned for the first time that a bird sleeps a great deal with one eye open.

Before I brought the birds home I laid in a supply of food¹ for them, such as pin cherries, blueberries, grasshoppers, and ants' eggs.

From the fourth to the ninth day the Thrushes developed rapidly. It had occurred to me to give them a platter of earth from an abandoned ant hill for a dust bath. They spent much time snuggled down in the dust or in the moss of the garden. During the fifth and sixth days I fed the Thrushes three ounces of steak, or one and one-half ounces a day. In this time they had also eaten considerable bread and milk, fifteen helpings of banana as large as a good-sized gooseberry, eighteen grasshoppers, two earthworms, three spiders, eighteen blueberries, twelve flies, two wild pears, four pin cherries, ten blackberries, and one-hundred-and-twenty ants' eggs. In addition to this I found that some of the birds were picking up blueberries and blackberries for themselves. They were perfectly healthy young birds.

As time passed I was more and more astonished to see how birds in the same nest differ in ability to fly, grasp food with the beak, pick up food, timidity and friendliness. One of the young birds seemed very independent, often seeking a perch by himself. The others generally cuddled down together and flew to the same perch. The smallest, up to the eighth day, was almost powerless to grasp anything with his beak; he relied

¹At this season ants' eggs were scarce. I found them in but one hill. At this date, however, the female grasshopper is very nourishing, being full of eggs. See "Nature Study and Life." By Hodge.



Hermit Thrush, about seven days old
Photo by Embert C. Osgood



Hermit Thrush, about ten days old